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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF PARLIAMENTARY REFORM IN FINLAND

1. (U) Summary and Action Request: This message contains an action request. Please see para. 7.

2. (U) Charg and APAO called on the Secretary General of the Finnish Parliament, Seppo Tiitinen, to discuss celebration plans for the 100 year anniversary of the Parliament beginning on June 1, 2006, and to offer Embassy support for the numerous events Parliament will be organizing throughout the two years of celebration. The Secretary General informed us that Speaker Paavo Lipponen

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extended personal invitations to Senator Ted Stevens (R-AL) and House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) to attend the event on June 1st. Tiitinen expressed an interest in having Stevens and Hastert present for a gala opening ceremony which will include the Speakers and Secretaries General of parliaments from throughout the Council of Europe, as well as from numerous other democracies. End summary.

Background

3. (U) In 2006, the Finnish Parliament will begin to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the parliamentary reform of 1906, when universal suffrage was introduced and Finnish women became the first in the world to receive full political rights. In 2007, Parliament will commemorate the 100 year anniversary of the first plenary session of the unicameral parliament. The theme for the celebrations during these two years will be: "The right to vote - trust in law. One hundred years of Finnish democracy." Tiitinen remarked that the celebrations are scheduled to last for two years and will focus on Finland's Parliament's evolution as one of the most modern in the world and on programs designed to appeal to younger audiences in an attempt to reverse voter apathy.

Celebrations on June 1, 2006

4. (U) On the eve of the Finnish parliamentary celebrations, the Speakers of the National Parliaments of Council of Europe member states will have concluded their conference in Tallinn, Estonia. The Finnish Parliament has arranged a special ferry connection from Tallinn to Helsinki on the morning of June 1, 2006. The invitations for Senator Stevens and Representative Hastert request their presence for a day of activities in Helsinki on June 1, 2006, including an ecumenical church service at the Lutheran Cathedral, a special session of the Parliament, a reception in the State Hall, and an evening program at the Finnish National Opera, which includes a banquet (note: accommodation costs for U.S. Congressional representatives will be covered by the Parliament). Tiitinen indicated that he and Speaker Lipponen would be happy to host a bilateral discussion with U.S. Congressional representatives to address subjects of mutual interest, including intensifying relations between the two parliamentary bodies.

Closing the Finnish Institute of International Affairs

5. (U) The special plenary session of Parliament will announce the creation of a new independent, parliamentary research institute, thus leading to the closure of the Ulkopoliittinen instituutti (UPI) - Finnish Institute of International Affairs (note: the Embassy has historically enjoyed very close relations with UPI and its staff as they functioned as one of our principal conference partners in Finland and elevated the level of debate about Finland's international security interests vis--vis the EU and NATO). Tiitinen remarked that the new parliamentary institute will be focusing very closely on the domestic and international dimensions of European Union affairs. In separate discussions with the APAO, Marjo Timonen, Head of

Information for the Parliament, noted that the thinking behind the creation of a new parliamentary research institute was shaped in the United States by Finnish visits to Congress and several think tanks in Washington DC.

Embassy support for parliamentary celebrations

16. (U) The Charg praised the efforts and plans of Tiitinen and his international relations staff as they manage the gargantuan task of organizing Parliament's anniversary celebrations with participation from all around the world. She offered to provide Embassy assistance and support for the celebrations and Tiitinen remarked that he was grateful for U.S support and noted that we were the first mission in Helsinki to approach him to discuss these plans and offer support. The Embassy will be working closely with Tiitinen's staff to identify opportunities for cooperation in these events.

17. (U) ACTION REQUEST: The Embassy would appreciate any information from H and/or EUR/NB on whether Senator Stevens or Representative Hastert have confirmed that they will be attending the Helsinki celebrations. Regards.